Caring:
Its Centrality to Teachers
and Teacher Education

By Diana Mayer Demetrulias

The education reform reports of the past decade, such as *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (1986), *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983), and *A Call for Change in Teacher Education* (1985), and more recently *America 2000* (1991), are based on a common assumption. They suggest that the schools need better teachers—intellectually brighter, more liberally educated, greater command of subject matter, better understanding of child development, better judgment.

Yet virtually absent from the rhetoric of education reform is a discussion of teacher characteristics related to human values and beliefs that are necessary for a competent professional who will nurture the nation's children intellectually **and** emotionally **and** ethically. Fenstermacher (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990) and Ryan (1989), among other educators, lament the absence of a discussion of the fundamental purpose of teaching and maintain that is not possible to define teaching without reference to the moral nature of the enterprise. Rogers and Webb (1990) indicate that in the reform movement, the relationship between moral development and learning has been ignored. These contrasting views from the public and the profession with regard to the

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preeminence and hierarchy of important teacher characteristics may serve as a continued source of conflict.

Within the teaching profession, the moral dimensions of teaching and of teachers have been of historical concern. The form of the discussion of moral education has changed throughout the decades, encompassing debate about issues such as civic education, good citizenship, moral development, values clarification, and ethics instruction. Implicit in these conceptual and pedagogical discussions is an assumption of the centrality of the teacher's values and ethics. Teachers know intuitively and empirically that the relationship between teacher characteristics and student learning is strong and definitive (Rogers & Webb, 1991). Teachers know that great teachers must possess intellectual competence, pedagogical expertness, as well as strong convictions about the worth of children, about schooling as a means for transmitting society's core values, about teaching as a moral endeavor, and about the role of the teacher as agent for the ethical development of children and youth.

Researchers have viewed teacher beliefs and values as central to the definition of effective teachers and to the quality of education. For example, most recently Goodlad (1990) and Goodlad *et al.* (1990) view the moral dimensions of teaching as a pervasive element for the professionalization of teaching. They suggest that the moral imperative for teachers and schooling is one of moral justice—essentially to right moral wrongs of the deferential education of some groups of children. Besides the element of enculturation inherent in schooling for a democratic society, Goodlad (1990) also describes moral justice in the context of educational decisionmaking, particularly as the decisions affect curriculum, groupings of students, instructional time, and teacher assignments.

Researchers have studied the beliefs and values of experienced and future teachers (Perry & Rog, 1992, and Brousseau, Book, & Byers, 1988), the beliefs of teachers regarding the teaching culture (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984), and the impact of teacher belief systems on the process of teaching (Clark, 1988). Studies have investigated the beliefs of students and experienced teachers in terms of important teacher characteristics (Waters, Kemp, & Pucci, 1988) and of differences in novice and expert teachers (Berliner, 1988). Studies by Prawat (1985) and Perry & Rog (1992) suggest that teacher characteristics that are defined as personal, social, or ethical are important to both preservice and inservice teachers. These studies report a high priority on affective concerns as compared to cognitive concerns, particularly caring as a characteristic of the effective teacher.

In contrast to the national debate on educational reform, the importance of beliefs, values, and ethics to teachers may suggest a disjuncture of opinion between persons within and outside of the profession. It is a possibility that a lack of compatibility between teacher beliefs and societal expectations of teachers and schooling may contribute to persistent conflict between the teaching profession and the citizenry with regard to the definition of quality teachers.

Research Questions

This study is intended to extend the research about the teacher characteristics identified as important by teachers. It is hypothesized that incongruency exists between the profession for whom personal characteristics and values of teachers are preeminent and the external forces calling for reform for whom intellectual and pedagogical characteristics of teachers are premier.

The following research questions were formulated: (1) What are the important teacher characteristics that teachers report as being of primary importance? (2) What is the degree of congruency with regard to important characteristics within the profession as reported by experienced teachers, future teachers, and university teacher educators? (3) How do the teacher characteristics reported by teachers compare to teacher characteristics as identified by various national reports on educational reform?

Sample

The sample included 892 persons divided into three groups: experienced teachers, future teachers, and teacher educators, all from central California. The group of experienced teachers totaled 133, of whom 89 were teaching in elementary schools (grades K-6) and 44 were teaching at a junior or senior high school. The future teachers group included 617 students who were enrolled in a teacher education program: 414 of these future teachers were in elementary education and 203 were in secondary education. The teacher educators included 142 university professors who participate in the baccalaureate and credential programs that lead to the certification of K-12 teachers. Thirty teacher educators were housed in the School of Education and 112 were housed in other academic departments. This involves an inclusive definition of teacher educators to reflect the California model of a post-baccalaureate credential program and a philosophy of an all-university responsibility for teacher education.

Method

A simple projective technique was used to gather data regarding the characteristics that teachers value in themselves as teachers. The teachers were given the task of drawing a caricature of the most important characteristic that they wished for their students to identify with them as teachers.

The projective technique and the emphasis on drawing was an intentional strategy to avoid a pedantic response to a straightforward request for the identification of teacher characteristics. This technique was employed to disarm the respondent so as to increase the probability of a genuine response rather than an expected, possibly unauthentic scholarly or theoretical response. Oral comments from the respondents indicated that they believed the research related to a psycho-

logical analysis of their selection of colors or their drawings.

The data were organized into frequency counts with similar adjectives grouped together and coded into four categories: (a) intellectual and academic characteristics such as intelligent, knowledgeable, critical thinker, creative; (b) ethical and social characteristics such as friendly, caring, loving, helpful, understanding, trustworthy; (c) communication characteristics such as enthusiastic, approachable, good listener, humorous; and (d) instructional and pedagogical characteristics such as disciplinarian, musical, challenging, organized, motivating.

The validity of the construct for each adjective was established by combining adjectives that are viewed in the research literature as closely related in construct. Responses were sorted by two faculty members into a priori categories. The interrater reliability index of the combination of adjectives for the three sorters into the four categories was .88.

A subanalysis was performed for comparing the responses of future and experienced teachers at the elementary versus secondary schools and for comparing the responses of teacher educators housed in a school of education versus teacher educators who reside in liberal arts departments.

Results

The research question related to the characteristics teachers report as of primary importance to them as teachers yielded statistically significant results (X^2=559.27 $\underline{df}$=3, $\underline{p}$<.0001). The data, as displayed in Table 1, indicate a significant difference in the frequency of teacher characteristics falling into the four categories of intellectual, ethical, communication, and pedagogical. The largest category of responses was ethical; its frequency represented 58.97 per cent of the total responses. The second largest category, communication, constituted 18.16 per cent of the total. The pedagogical category represented 13.23 per cent of the total, and intellectual characteristics ranked fourth with 9.64 per cent of the total responses.

A 3 x 3 chi square analysis was conducted of the characteristics in the ethical category which was cited the most frequently by all three groups. As indicated in Table 2, for the total group two characteristics were dominant: caring and friendly. Caring (and related characteristics such as empathy, love, compassion, understanding), constituted the greatest percentage of responses, 81.37 per cent. The characteristic friendly was second in frequency with 11.41 per cent of the total responses. All other ethical characteristics represented only 7.22 per cent of the total responses. These data yielded statistically significant results: X^2=55.52, $\underline{df}$=4, $\underline{p}$<.001. The caring characteristic represented approximately the same distribution for all three groups (future teachers, practicing teachers, and teacher educators) with percentages ranging from 75.6 to 82.8. Greater variability was found with regard to friendliness. Approximately 15 per cent of the future teachers viewed this characteristic as of primary importance as compared to only 5 per cent of the experienced

Table 1
Frequency of Teacher Characteristics By Category as Cited
by Future Teachers, Experienced Teachers, and Teacher Educators

	Intellectual	Ethical	Communication	Pedagogical	Total
Elementary Future	18	287	89	20	414
Secondary Future	19	96	30	58	203
Subtotal Future	37	383	119	78	617
Elementary Experienced	7	61	11	10	89
Secondary Experienced	14	17	5	8	44
Subtotal Experienced	21	78	16	18	133
Teacher Educators (ED)[a]	6	12	3	9	30
Teacher Educators (AS)[b]	22	53	24	13	112
Subtotal Educators	28	65	27	22	142
Total Frequency	86	526	162	118	892
Percentage	9.64	58.97	18.16	13.23	100
Rank	4	1	2	3	

[a] School of Education   [b] Arts and Sciences

Table 2
Frequency of Ethical Characteristics

	Future Teachers		Experienced Teachers		Teacher Educators		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Caring*	317	82.8	59	75.6	52	80.0	428	81.4
Friendly	56	14.6	4	5.1	0		60	11.4
Other	10	2.6	15	9.3	13	20.0	38	7.2
Total	383	100.0	78	100.0	65	100.0	526	100.0

* Includes loving, empathetic, compassionate, warm, and understanding

teachers and none of the teacher educators.

The hypothesis testing the degree of congruency between experienced teachers, future teachers, and teacher educators yielded statistically significant results. A 4 x 6 chi square analysis indicated that the frequency of responses differed among the three groups (X^2=145.06, $\underline{df}$=15, $\underline{p}$<.001). While all three groups identified ethical characteristics most frequently, experienced teachers and teacher educators cited intellectual characteristics as the second most important characteristics while these characteristics were cited least frequently by the future teachers for whom communication characteristics were the second most important category.

A subgroup analysis of future teachers found statistically significant differences between elementary education and secondary education students (X^2=80.27, $\underline{df}$=3, $\underline{p}$<.001). The responses of both groups were most frequent for ethical characteristics. However, secondary future teachers in comparison to elementary future teachers placed greater importance on pedagogy (28.6 per cent vs 4.8 per cent) and intellect (9.4 per cent vs 4.3 per cent). Elementary students on the other hand, placed greater importance on communication.

A subgroup analysis of experienced teachers yielded statistically significant differences between teachers in the elementary and secondary schools (X^2=16.26, $\underline{df}$=3, $\underline{p}$<.01). Of the experienced teachers in elementary schools, 68.5 per cent cited ethical skills as of first importance while only 38.6 per cent of experienced teachers in secondary schools did so. The experienced secondary teachers identified intellectual skills in 31.8 per cent of the cases (a percentage comparable to the ethical category), followed by pedagogy (18.2 per cent) and communication (11.4 per cent). For the elementary experienced teachers characteristics related to pedagogy and communication were a similar percentage (about 11-12 per cent), with intellectual characteristics cited in about 8 per cent of the cases.

A subgroup analysis of teacher educators approached but did not demonstrate statistically significant differences between professors housed in the School of Education and those in other academic departments in the arts and sciences (X^2=7.07, $\underline{df}$=3, $\underline{p}$>.05).

Discussion

Important Characteristics

The results indicate that teachers as a collective group view ethical characteristics of teachers as of primary importance followed by communication, pedagogical, and intellectual characteristics. Further, a high degree of congruency exists for the beliefs of future teachers, experienced teachers, and teacher educators as related to the importance of ethical characteristics in general and caring specifically. However, differences were found between elementary and secondary experienced and future teachers with regard to the second most important characteristics.

Secondary teachers placed greater emphasis on intellectual and pedagogical characteristics in comparison to elementary teachers who tended to emphasize communication skills as the second most important category of teacher characteristics. This finding corroborates general perception and research (Weinstein, 1989) which indicate that secondary teachers tend to place greater priority on subject matter and intellectual development while elementary teachers are more child-centered and view teaching as an act of nurturance as well as intellectual development.

Within the ethical category, teachers overwhelmingly identified caring as a critical dimension. As a construct, caring is defined by Mayeroff (1971) as not merely liking someone, nor as an isolated feeling of concern. It is viewed as extension of love—agape—and is central to a desire to help another person grow and actualize (Noddings, 1988). The professional literature contains discussions of the values of honesty, love, patience, trust, selflessness, understanding, empathy, understanding, and compassion as values closely related to caring.

Scholars such as Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik (1990), Ryan (1989), Noddings (1984, 1988), Mayeroff (1971), Boyer (1983), and Sizer (1984) raise questions about the role of the teacher as a moral agent, as a model for the moral growth of children, and as the professional responsible for the transmission of ethical goals to an educated citizenry. But caring as a moral characteristic of teachers and the use of ethics for pedagogical decision making is studied infrequently by educational researchers.

The educational debate about values and ethics of students and teachers is affected by political, social, and theological issues. The controversy is also rooted in the early history of American schools—a time in which schooling was viewed as one means for the transmission of moral values and a time in which teachers lives were controlled by a strict definition of morality. However, with the increased sensitivity to pluralism and civil rights, Americans have experienced ambivalence with regard to the teaching of values, ethics, civics, and morals.

Implications for Teacher Education

Within the context of teacher education, Shulman (1986) argues that there are three types of knowledge about teaching: knowledge derived from empirical or philosophical inquiry, from practical experience, and from moral or ethical reasoning. The category of moral/ethical reasoning as the source of knowledge is normative and reflects the values and ideology to which teachers commit and transmit to their students. This knowledge is based on a concept of a moral right as defined within a democratic society. As a source of knowledge, moral and ethical reasoning then should be central to pedagogical decision making.

During the planning of a lesson, Noddings (1986) suggests these questions, among others, to guide teachers' choices of instructional methods: (1) What methods of teaching are consonant with the principle of caring? (2) What effect will

a chosen teaching method have on the students? (3) What effect will the teaching method have on the classroom climate when one is trying to achieve a caring community? (4) Will the teaching method demonstrate the teacher's caring attitude toward the students?

For teacher educators, a syllogism follows from the premise of caring as a fundamental moral and pedagogical dimension. If caring is central to the teaching of children, then it follows that teacher educators must care not only about children but about the future teachers as well, must treat future teachers in caring ways, and must demonstrate methods that future teachers may use in the nurturance of caring children. In this regard, the educational professorate serves as role models for the enhancement of a social commitment. Boyer (1990) argues for the centrality of caring in higher education and suggests that the social and intellectual bonding of students occurs most frequently in the caring classroom, enabling students both to gain knowledge and to use it in humane ways.

Rogers and Webb (1991) conducted an ethnographic study of elementary school teachers and students and found support for the ethic of caring as an essential component of effective teaching. Seven characteristics of teacher education programs are discussed as vehicles for the development of the ethic of caring. These include the curriculum, construction, modeling, dialogue, reflection, confirmation, practice, and continuity.

Admission criteria for entry into educational programs should include an assessment of the candidate with regard to his/her caring and other moral dimensions of teaching. These are difficult dimensions to discern and require a judgment that may or may not be predictive. In addition, criteria for exit from program and issuance of a teaching credential should include the degree to which the future teacher demonstrated caring attitudes toward children and colleagues, used reasoned judgment from an ethical perspective, and established and used criteria upon which to base judgments. It is also suggested that the teacher education curricula be revised to include the ethical dimension of pedagogy in readings, course content, fieldwork, and student teaching experiences. Nash (1991) argues for an applied ethics course in teacher education that assists preservice teachers in understanding the complexity of ethical decisionmaking.

Implications for Educational Reform

It is compelling and intriguing that the definition of good teachers is defined by teachers primarily in terms of positive personal characteristics and concomitant interpersonal relationships. Yet policymakers define good teachers primarily through a prism shaped by student outcomes assessment, grade point averages, standardized test scores, and compliance with externally prescribed standards of instructional effectiveness.

The virtual absence of the subject of the personal characteristics of teachers in the debates reported by national commissions on educational reform suggests a

challenge for the profession, for national accrediting bodies, and for the school policymakers at the local, state, and national levels. We must grapple with the complex issue of teacher characteristics and deal with fundamental questions about human values and schooling-particularly given the societal factors that may account for a decline in the number and strength of caring relationships between children and adults.

It is recommended that future research studies and education's discourse consider the following questions about teacher beliefs, teaching cultures, and ethical dimensions of teaching:

1. Research has demonstrated a developmental process in which future teachers establish and confirm beliefs about teaching, teachers, and schooling. Is this process an appropriate construct with regard to values related to caring and the image of the teacher as friend?
2. Is it possible to assess students' ethical beliefs prior to and during baccalaureate and teacher education programs?
3. Is it possible to nurture caring and the moral dimensions of teaching given the current design of teacher education programs?
4. Do state and national accreditation bodies embrace the moral dimensions of teaching and teachers as evidenced in standards for programs and faculty?
5. To what degree do beliefs of feminine characteristics and of feminist values affect the goal of caring as central to teacher effectiveness?
6. What role may educational researchers play in establishing the legitimacy for the study of the ethical underpinnings of teaching and schooling?
7. What are the effective ways to recruit teachers whose ethical orientations are consistent with a caring profession?
8. What methods of discourse are most effective for gaining congruency of views of persons within and outside of the profession?

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